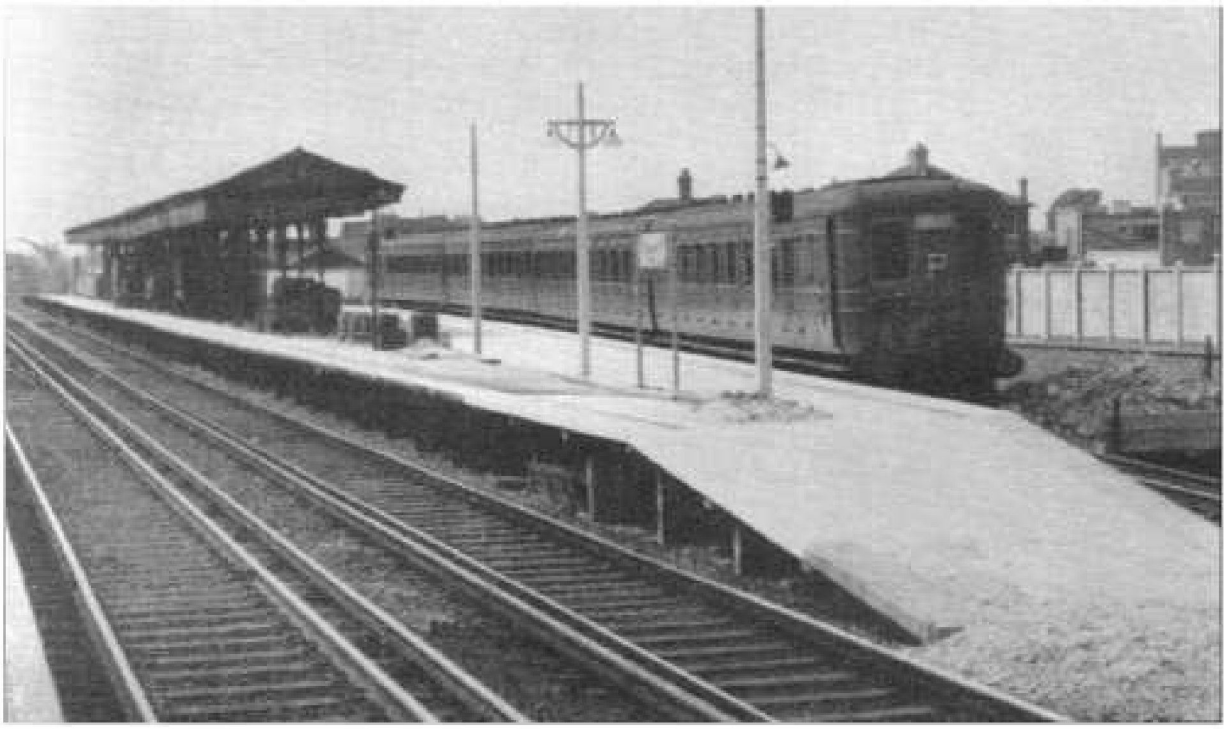
The West End of London Railway

By CHARLES E. LEE



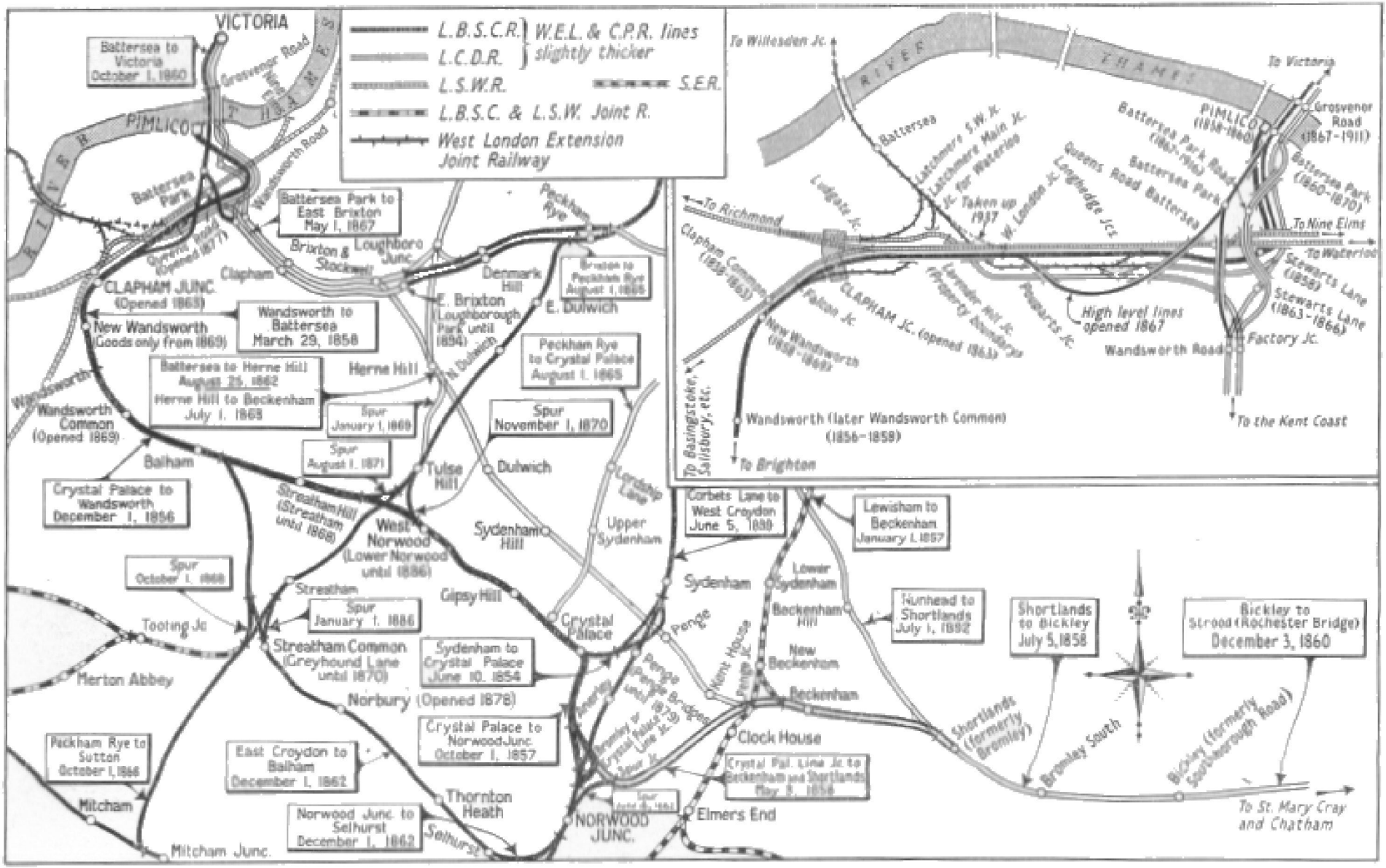
Photo] [*K. G. Carr*

Crystal Palace line train at Balham Station in July, 1955. The railway was electrified on the overhead system in 1911, and with third rail conductors in 1926 as part of the Southern Railway electrified network

RAILWAY promotion in Great Britain was suspended almost entirely in the years following the Railway Mania crisis of 1847. The Great Exhibition of 1851 in Hyde Park did much to restore industrial confidence, and by 1852 the worst of the depression was over. The exhibition, with its heavy traffic, had directed attention to developments in the West End of London, and to the fact that the railways from the south and south-east had only their combined terminus at the south side of London Bridge. This was the background in which the railways of South London began their development, and the erection of the Crystal Palace at Sydenham was the first focal point.

The Palace which was erected in Hyde Park for the Great Exhibition was removed in the following year, despite popular feeling in favour of the permanent retention of the building for social and educational activities. In May, 1852, the Crystal Palace Company was formed, mainly by persons prominently associated with the L.B.S.C.R. The Chairman was Samuel Laing, who was Chairman of the L.B.S.C.R. from 1848 to 1855 and again from 1867 to 1896. The Crystal Palace Company bought Penge Park, of some 300 acres, from Leo Schuster for £86,661. Schuster was a director of the L.B.S.C.R. and became its Chairman from 1856 to 1866. The materials of the building in Hyde Park were bought on May 24, 1852, for £70,000 and were re-erected at Sydenham by Fox, Henderson & Company; the first column was formally set up by Laing on August 5, 1852, and a Royal Charter of Incorporation was granted to the Crystal Palace Company on January 28, 1853.

In addition to the access afforded by the L.B.S.C.R. at Sydenham Station, three new railways were projected in 1852 to serve the new site of the Crystal Palace. The first was a branch of the L.B.S.C.R. from Sydenham to a station in the grounds of the Crystal Palace. This was authorised by an Act of July 8, 1853, and formally opened by the directors on March 27, 1854. Goods traffic began forthwith, but the line was not opened for



Chronological map of the West End of London & Crystal Palace Railway and associated lines

passenger traffic until June 10, 1854, the day on which Queen Victoria opened the Crystal Palace in the presence of 40,000 spectators. Another scheme was the Vauxhall & Sydenham Railway, intended to extend from the L.S.W.R. at Vauxhall, through Clapham Rise and Herne Hill, to the Dartmouth Arms (now Forest Hill) Station of the L.B.S.C.R.

The third scheme was the West End of London & Crystal Palace Railway, from a terminus on the bank of the River Thames at Battersea Park, running through Clapham and Balham to an end-on terminus at the Crystal Palace with the L.B.S.C.R. branch. In the promotion of the second and third schemes, there was some suggestion of lack of complete harmony in the Crystal Palace management, for the Vauxhall & Sydenham Railway was advertised with Fox, Henderson & Company as contractors, and as guaranteeing a return for 14 years, whereas the West End of London line was associated with the L.B.S.C.R. and also with the Crystal Palace directors. In the outcome, the Vauxhall scheme did not proceed, but the West End line was built, and formally opened its first section exactly one hundred years ago.

The West End scheme, although in friendly association with the L.B.S.C.R., was an independent promotion, under the chairmanship of Samuel Beale, a Birmingham merchant, who was on the board of a number of railways, including the Midland, of which he was Deputy Chairman. In early years it was believed in financial circles to have been promoted with the object of occupying strategic territory with a view to a profitable sale to one or other of the southern companies.

The West End of London & Crystal Palace Railway Company was incorporated by Act of August 4, 1853, which empowered it to provide railway communication between the West End of London and the Crystal Palace by means of a line from the London & South Western Railway at approximately where Clapham Junction now is, through New Wandsworth, Streatham, and Gipsy Hill, to the Crystal Palace, a distance of about 5¾ miles. Branches were authorised to the L.B.S.C.R. at Norwood, and to the south side of the River Thames at Battersea, adjacent to the new Chelsea Suspension Bridge. This bridge was then being built, at a cost of about £95,000. It was authorised by an Act of 1846, and work was begun in September, 1851.

From its earliest days, the West End Company had far more ambitious thoughts than merely handling local traffic to the Crystal Palace, and aspired to become part of a main line approach to the West End, as, in fact, it did eventually by affording access to Victoria. In 1853 tentative arrangements were made between the L.B.S.C.R., the L.S.W.R., and the West End Company for an enlarged terminus at Waterloo, which would accommodate the Brighton Company's West London traffic, but the

Seal of the West End of London & Crystal Palace Railway

scheme fell through, as the South Western found itself unable to provide sufficient land for a suitable terminus. Samuel Beale and his associates then took steps to promote a separate terminus, and the Westminster Terminus Railway was incorporated on July 31, 1854. This was followed by the Westminster Terminus Extension Railway, which received its Act on August 14, 1855, and was authorised to make an improved approach through Clapham. Nothing came of these proposals.

Simultaneously, proposals were made in connection with the Crystal Palace end of the line. In 1854 both the South Eastern Railway and the West End Railway sought powers to build lines through Beckenham to Bromley, as the beginning of railways to serve mid-Kent.

The West End Company withdrew its Bill, as, by making a line from its Norwood branch to the proposed S.E.R. mid-Kent line, the district would be served, and passengers to the western parts of London would use the West End Railway. The S.E.R. then withdrew its Bill, so the West End Company applied to have its own reinstated. Parliament agreed, and in due course sanctioned the proposal as the Farnborough Extension, by an Act of July 31, 1854. At the time, this was intended to form part of a mid-Kent line extending to Maidstone or to Tonbridge.

area, and were not modified until the passage of the S.E.R. (Cator Agreement) Act of 1897. On July 21, 1856, a company was incorporated under the title of the Mid Kent (Bromley to St. Mary Cray) Railway, with powers to build a line from Bromley (now Shortlands), on the West End Company's Farnborough Extension, to St. Mary Cray.

Up to this point the West End Company, with its original line still under construction, had flirted with the L.B.S.C.R., the L.S.W.R., and the S.E.R., but a turn of events in Kent altered the complexion of the situation, and brought

Photo] [*R. C. Riley*

The signalbox and tunnel portal at Crystal Palace Station in July, 1953

At Beckenham, members of the Cator family (formerly residing at Beckenham Place) were the owners of about 1,500 acres of the surrounding country. The Farnborough Extension was the first railway to be authorised to pass through their lands. Strong opposition to the Bill had been made by John Cator, but this was met by an agreement with him of July 15, 1854, which provided penal clauses for any breach of an undertaking that there should be no Sunday goods traffic at any station in a defined area of Beckenham, no Sunday reduced fares, and a maximum of seven Sunday trains each way, of which three were to be before 10 a.m., one between 1.30 and 2.30 p.m., and three after 6 p.m. Similar restrictions were imposed on other railways in the

a newcomer on the scene. The East Kent Railway had been incorporated on August 4, 1853—the same day as the West End Company—to build a railway from Strood (on the S.E.R.) to Canterbury, and in 1855 powers were secured for an extension to Dover. Whatever was in the minds of the East Kent promoters, there can be no doubt that Parliament, the S.E.R., and the public at large, regarded the East Kent Railway as an extension of the S.E.R. North Kent line. The new company did not obtain running powers over this North Kent section, but only a "facilitation clause" requiring the S.E.R. to transmit East Kent traffic as expeditiously as its own.

In 1856 the East Kent was dissatisfied with its restricted link with London and

for the first time came into the open as a direct rival to the S.E.R. It promoted a Bill seeking running powers between Strood and Dartford, and authority to build a new railway thence, through Lewisham, to link up with the West End Company's system. This application failed, but the strong opposition of the S.E.R. in stating that its North Kent line already had all the traffic it could carry, actually assisted the East Kent to persuade Parliament to sanction in 1858 a separate and distinct approach to London by means of a railway from Strood to St. Mary Cray.

The first section of the West End of London Railway was opened formally by the directors and their friends on Thursday, October 30, 1856, preparatory to the inauguration of public traffic, which began on December 1. It extended from an end-on junction with the Crystal Palace branch of the L.B.S.C.R. to a temporary terminus at Wandsworth Common, with intermediate stations at Gipsy Hill, Lower Norwood, Streatham, and Balham. At the opening it was stated that "the stations are so placed as to afford accommodation at those points where the leading highways are crossed." The temporary terminus was in the northern part of Wandsworth Common, and not at the south end, where the present station of this name (opened November 1, 1869) is, adjacent to the Nightingale Lane crossing. Streatham Station was renamed Brixton Hill on September 1, 1868, as the name Streatham was to be given to a station on the new Peckham Rye to Sutton railway, opened on October 1, 1868. It was further renamed Streatham Hill in January, 1869. Lower Norwood Station became West Norwood on January 1, 1886.

A contemporary description of the railway in *Herapath's Journal* said: "The line emerges from a bell-mouthed tunnel passing under a portion of the Crystal Palace. The tunnel is 750 yd. long,* and passes within 20 yd. of a perpendicular line from the base of one of the water towers. About two miles further on there is another tunnel, 438 yd. long.* These works, as well as all the bridges upon the line, are of the most substantial character. The linings of the tunnels are constructed of a peculiarly hard brick, manufactured at the Aylesbury Potteries of Mr. Betts, on the Rochester and Maidstone Railway, and, to give durability to the linings, they have been put in with Portland cement. The gradients in the heaviest portions of the line are about 1 in 89.

"In some places the cuttings and embankments are heavy, one of the cuttings having had 230,000 cubic yards taken from it, and one of the embankments having required 160,000 cubic yards of earth. The ballast for the road has been supplied from Wandsworth Common. . . . The road is admirably laid and in excellent condition. There is a brick viaduct at Norwood of 11 arches, 150 yd. in length, and an average height of some 35 ft., which was constructed in ten weeks, including a depth of 12 ft. for the foundation. . . . The works throughout appear to be of a most substantial character. . . . The line was constructed by Messrs. Peto, Brassey, and Betts, under the direction of the engineers, Messrs. Bidder,† Fulton, and Phipps. . . . The cost of the 4⅝ miles of railway is estimated at about £250,000."

The railway was worked from the outset by the L.B.S.C.R., and the original timetable shows 14 trains each way daily, running through from London Bridge to Wandsworth Common. The branch from the Crystal Palace to Norwood Junction, a length of 1 mile 19 chains, was opened on October 1, 1857. The down line crossed the main line to London Bridge by a flyover, in the same way as the L.B.S.C.R. branch to the Crystal Palace had done at Sydenham in 1854. This also was worked by the L.B.S.C.R.

The formal opening of the line to the Pimlico terminus (Battersea), by the directors and their friends, took place on Saturday, March 27, 1858, and public traffic began on Monday, March 29. It resulted in an immediate increase in passenger traffic; from January 1 to March 28 the number of passengers totalled 105,766, and from then to June 30, 354,310, or 460,076 for the half year. There were intermediate stations at New Wandsworth (at the point where Battersea Rise crosses the railway) and at Stewarts Lane (not to be confused with the slightly later L.C.D.R. station of

* An official list compiled in recent years gives the length of the Crystal Palace Tunnel as 745 yd., and that of the Leigham Court (Streatham Hill) Tunnel as 443 yd.

† The famous George Parker Bidder (June 14, 1806-September 28, 1878), the "Calculating Boy"

the same name). The first Stewarts Lane appears to have survived only a few months, as it last appeared in *Bradshaw* for November, 1858. The temporary terminus called Wandsworth Common continued in use for about two months as an intermediate station, but was closed on May 31, 1858, as it was about half a mile from New Wandsworth. The latter itself was closed to passengers as from November 1, 1869, when the new Wandsworth Common Station, already mentioned, was opened. The new terminus was officially named Pimlico, although it was on the Surrey side of the river; the road link provided by Chelsea Bridge was also opened in March, 1858.

On May 3, 1858, the portion of the Farnborough Extension from Norwood (Bromley or Crystal Palace Line Junction) to Bromley (now Shortlands) was opened. It was a double line from the junction to Beckenham and a single line thence to Bromley. In consequence of agreements between the Brighton and the South Eastern Railways, it became necessary for the West End Company to work this section independently, and to secure a locomotive and rolling stock for the purpose. A shuttle train service was worked to and from the Crystal Palace in connection with the London trains.

The East Kent Railway had been opened from Chatham to Faversham on January 25, 1858, and from Chatham to Strood a few weeks later. Its Act for the Western Extension from Strood to St. Mary Cray received the Royal Assent on July 23, 1858, and the name of the company was changed to the London, Chatham & Dover Railway by Act of August 1, 1859. An arrangement was made for the purchase of the Farnborough Extension of the West End of London Company, subject to the sanction of Parliament, and this was duly given in an Act of July 23, 1860. The further section of line from Bromley (Shortlands) to Southborough Road (now Bickley), a distance of 2⅜ miles, was opened on July 5, 1858, by the Mid Kent (Bromley to St. Mary Cray) Railway. At first it was leased and worked by the South Eastern Railway as an extension of its Mid Kent line, which had been opened from Lewisham Junction to Beckenham on January 1, 1857. Eventually the St. Mary Cray Railway was leased to the L.C.D.R. for 999 years from September 1, 1863, under an Act of August 7, 1862, but it continued to exist as a separate company until 1923, when it was merged into the Southern Railway.

On July 23, 1858, the Victoria Station & Pimlico Railway Company was incorporated to build a general station "near Victoria Street, Pimlico," and a connecting line thence to the West End of London Railway at Battersea. The scheme was closely associated with the L.B.S.C.R., and the latter arranged to take over the Battersea-Norwood portion of the West End Company, which constituted the approach line; this duly became effective as from July 1, 1859. The new line from Battersea (Stewarts Lane Junction) to Victoria "on the site of the Grosvenor Canal Basin" was opened for public traffic on Monday, October 1, 1860. *Herapath's Railway Journal* called this "the event of the week," a phrase at which few would cavil 96 years later. At first, only L.B.S.C.R. traffic used Victoria, but even this enabled Pimlico (Battersea) to be closed to passenger traffic immediately, as the L.C.D.R. traffic had not yet begun. The great Pimlico terminus at Battersea, envisaged by the promoters of the West End of London & Crystal Palace Railway, thus had a life of exactly 21¾ years.

The Western Extension of the L.C.D.R. (formerly the East Kent Railway) was opened on Monday, December 3, 1860, and enabled a new through rail service to be begun between Victoria and Canterbury with a road connection to Dover. The new line opened that day was from Bickley to Rochester Bridge (Strood), a distance of just under 21 miles. The portion between Bickley and St. Mary Cray was authorised to the St. Mary Cray Company, but was built and worked by the L.C.D.R. under agreement. At first the L.C.D.R. trains called at intermediate stations on the West End of London line, but carried no Victoria to Crystal Palace or intermediate passengers; the first fare from Victoria was to Beckenham. Later, the L.C.D.R. trains for a time ran non-stop between Victoria and Crystal Palace, but subsequently called at some stations. The local shuttle trains between Crystal Palace and Shortlands were discontinued immediately on the opening of the through service. Under an Act of August 1, 1859, the L.B.S.C.R. built a spur from Norwood Junction to

Spur Junction on the Farnborough Extension. This was opened on June 18, 1862, and enabled a local L.C.D.R. service between Beckenham and Norwood Junction to be begun; it lasted until 1917.

On July 3, 1860, the L.B.S.C.R. secured powers to build what was, in effect, a cut-off line between Balham and Windmill Bridge Junction, East Croydon. This was opened on December 1, 1862, and became the main line between Victoria and East Croydon. For seven months more the Balham to Crystal Palace section continued to be part of a main line for L.C.D.R. trains, but since has been used primarily for suburban traffic. The L.C.D.R. line from Stewarts Lane to Herne Hill was opened on August 25, 1862 (the day on which the "Chatham" side of Victoria Station was opened), but for a few months was only of local importance. It was extended to Penge Junction (near Beckenham) on July 1, 1863, and the L.C.D.R. main-line service was transferred to the new route forthwith, in replacement of the route *via* Crystal Palace. It thus no longer traversed any portion of the West End of London Company's line that had passed to the L.B.S.C.R., although it still used the section between Penge Junction and Shortlands which had been built by the West End Company. Henceforward, the story of the West End of London Company's lines is no longer that of a separate unit with its own particular commitments, but is part of the history of the two main systems which had absorbed them.

The section from "Pimlico" (now occupied by Battersea Goods Depot) to Poupart's Junction bears little evidence of its short-lived glory as London's first West End passenger terminus. Thence to Balham, the original route forms part of the modern four-track main line from Victoria to Brighton. The remainder of the line to Crystal Palace and Norwood Junction retains much of its original form and continues to pay tribute to the excellent engineering of its builders. The railway from Victoria to Crystal Palace was electrified on the overhead system on May 12, 1911, and was the second section of the L.B.S.C.R. to be converted. Third rail electrification followed in 1929.

Photo] [*K. G. Carr*

Electric suburban train on the up relief line between Wandsworth Common and Clapham Junction

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